



City of Santa Clara

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Campaign 2008

Good government begins at the ballot box

'Vote Ethics' program builds public trust and confidence in government

Another election season, another reason to Vote Ethics

By Thomas Shanks, Ph.D.

For the third consecutive election season, the City of Santa Clara is asking voters to use the ballot box to hold candidates accountable for conducting political campaigns that can be hard-hitting, but also issue-oriented, honest, fair and respectful.

The City's Vote Ethics public education outreach is nonpartisan and nonpolitical. It does not tell voters how to vote. Instead, it provides voters with tools to make a candidate's ethics and values an important part of the voting decision. It encourages voters to look to the candidate's campaign for evidence of trustworthy leadership, a commitment to the City's Code of Ethics & Values, and the capacity to lead the City's Ethics & Values program.

Now in its 10th year, the Ethics Program has earned statewide, national and international recognition for fostering good government and public trust. The program provides elected and appointed officials, City staff and City volunteers with practical skills and training on how to be at their best in their service to residents and in their treatment of each other. Research shows that Santa Clara residents now trust the City more than county, state or federal government, and they have more pride in being Santa Clara residents.

Resident involvement in Vote Ethics is critical to the program's success. The main message to candidates and their supporters is that residents in Santa Clara pay attention to campaigns and expect candidate claims and criticisms to be based in fact, relevant, and important for voters to know. Voters want solid information so they can make their best choices. They want elected officials they can trust, and they look at campaign conduct for evidence of that.

Vote Ethics also provides voters with tools so they can tell who is conducting a campaign that focuses on issues, qualifications, and vision, not on misleading attacks meant to deceive voters. The program focuses on practical ways to recognize fair and unfair campaigning so that voters have that knowledge before they cast their ballots.

Good government relies on you. Register to vote. Talk with friends about politics, ethics, and what the City needs. Watch and listen to the candidates. Then use what you've learned to make your best voting decisions.

Dr. Shanks, a consultant on ethics and past Director of the MeritLink Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University, has worked with the City of Santa Clara on its groundbreaking ethics program for the past 10 years.



Evaluate candidate ethics with this checklist

The candidates who foster public trust are those who:

- ☐ Tell the truth about themselves
- ☐ Focus on issues relevant for Santa Clara
- ☐ Tell truths about opponents that are important for voters to know
- ☐ Point out differences between themselves and opponents that are relevant to the political office
- ☐ Treat opponents with dignity and respect
- ☐ Fight fairly and avoid demeaning or irrelevant personal attacks
- ☐ Never try to confuse or mislead voters
- ☐ Clearly identify who is behind any committee that is candidate controlled
- ☐ Take responsibility for any mistakes they make or mistakes made by volunteers or consultants
- ☐ Publicly and forcefully criticize unfair, dishonest or disrespectful attacks on other candidates from any source
- ☐ Keep their promise to conduct an issue-oriented, honest, fair and respectful campaign

City of Santa Clara Code of Ethics & Values

At the heart of the Vote Ethics program is the City's Code of Ethics & Values. Developed by the community, the Code identifies eight values that demonstrate the highest level of public service and that are fundamental to public trust. The Code guides actions and decisions every day in City Hall.

Ethical	Organized
Professional	Communicative
Service-Oriented	Collaborative
Fiscally Responsible	Progressive